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Background Statement

Looking back at my time in the public education system causes me to recall many of my thoughts and feelings toward my educators. The first thing that really comes to mind is my expectation for my teachers. Above all else, my greatest expectation for my teachers has always been respect for the students. As long as my teachers show that they are willing to respect me, my ideas, and my questions, things should go decently. Other than that, I have also consistently expected my teachers to have the important content knowledge to teach their course. I have had a few teachers who knew less about the content than me, and that made it significantly harder to respect them.

The expectations for the public school system for most students seemed to match up with my own. I know a few of my peers were looking for more out of their schooling, and I also know they received the help they needed. For example, some students are looking for teachers who are willing to listen to problems they are having at home or outside of school. I am also fully aware that many of the teachers in my school were willing to do that.

After school, my expectations were passed on to my parents. My parents had similar expectations for my education. They thought that it was very necessary for teachers to respect their students, just like I did. They also wanted teachers to know their content areas well. I had talked with my parents about the teachers who did not match up to my expectations, and they helped me understand the work in those classes. Many times, the teachers who neither understood the content nor respected students also gave students the worse grades.

The expectations for the business world are a little different from the expectations for students. The business world wants all students to come out of school ready to start working and to be fully trained to have a profession. Although some people view education the same way, as a path to finding a job, it holds a much greater importance. Students star building bonds between themselves and their peers that can last a lifetime while they are in school. Students can also find a place where they feel most comfortable to share their ideas. Schools can serve many functions other than simply training students for the future.

Most of my classes throughout my education process matched up with my expectations, even though a few didn’t. It seems to me that the best classes I had were set up with desks being in clusters, so the students would get a chance to work as a small group to understand a particularly challenging problem. This seating arrangement also consistently aided us in building stronger bonds with our peers. Since we usually sat in clusters with the same students every day, we tended to make tighter bonds.

The single greatest teaching strategy was definitely giving us choice. I have been assigned many projects where I was given a choice in what I studied or a choice of medium, and those were always the most enjoyable. Beyond that, I feel like I learned more from those types of assignments. By giving students an opportunity to look into a subject that interests them, teachers can open their students’ minds to new ideas. For example, in one of my college courses, I was able to go to the State House to observe the Education Committee in a public hearing. I definitely had my own idea on the topic being discussed, but listening to the opposition allowed me to get a better understanding of the issue.

If I could point out one teacher who made use of the strategy of choice the best, I would say it is Linda Beck, my professor for Political Theory, African Politics, and Civic Engagement Practicum. She offered us all various choices in how we went about our studies. In Political Theory, we were generally in clusters so we could discuss the difficult readings of classical philosophers. In African Politics, we were each given the choice of a African country that we could study throughout the semester. Civic Engagement Practicum gave each of the chance to work with a non-profit organization of our choosing that stands for something we believe in.

As far as diversity goes, my school didn’t have much. The only real cultural diversity we saw in school came from a few students who are the children of Cambodian refugees. Other than that, we had a few exchange students from Germany, but everyone acted and looked pretty similar.

Most of my classes were structured in a way that led from point A to point B. For example, teachers would go over the fundamentals of math before leading into algebra. The only class that really varied this was my Government class. In this class, we looked at such a variety of topics related to government that it would have been difficult to follow one exact pattern. Instead, we started out looking at the topics that affected us most as individuals, and then branched out into deeper topics that weren’t as relevant in daily life.

In high school, I took a combination of honors and college prep classes. My honors classes were generally English and Social Studies, while I stayed in college prep Science and Math. Overall, the education I received was very good. However, I can think of two honors classes I took that felt as though they weren’t challenging at all. Anyone could sign up for honors classes, and these two classes were filled with students who were challenged in college prep, meaning our teacher would always take time out of class to repeatedly go over topics previously cover.

I think these experiences will affect my take on teaching by giving me an ideal to strive for, while also allowing me to learn from the mistakes of my former teachers. While I do want to make sure my students feel comfortable in my classroom, I also want to challenge them and make sure they are getting something out of my class. I also definitely want to give my students some choice in what the curriculum covers. This can be as easy as having my students write a paper on a historically-based book of their choosing.

I selected teaching as a profession when I was 14 because of the strong connection I made with my Social Studies teacher, Ken Bryant. He was an amazing lecturer, but most of his classes were focused only on lectures. It wasn’t until I had a traumatic brain injury that I realized how much he truly cared about all his students. I want to take that caring personality that Mr. Bryant showed me and allow all my students to see it regularly, whereas he was well-reserved and didn’t show it very often.

I would say the traits of a superior teacher are captured in Mr. Bryant. He was easily the most caring, most knowledgeable, and funniest teacher I’ve ever had. Even though Mr. Bryant didn’t show his caring side very often, I think it is very important to show students how much you care as a teacher. Having knowledge of information outside your content area can also be very important in answering various questions your students might have. I also find humor to be very important, mainly because it can help students to better connect with the content and their teacher.

By being a teacher I hope that I can gain the satisfaction of knowing that I have somehow changed the life of my students. I understand that not all of my students will build connections with me, but I hope those that do will remember the lessons they have learned for their entire lives, the same way that Mr. Bryant’s teachings have stayed with me. Furthermore, I hope I can encourage my students to become active in their community. In my high school, many teachers talked about becoming socially active, but not many of them pursued the idea fully.

I hope that I can contribute by offering a fresh look at old ideas. My thoughts on our education system and political ideas probably don’t match up to my peers, but I think this new understanding could offer a better understanding of how students can become active in what is important to them. I also think that my take on our education system could help my students gain a greater understanding of the content, beyond what is normally taught.

My greatest fear always has been and always will be the line between sending a student to the office and having a brief conversation. I am not a strong believer in the schools’ disciplinary system. For example, I think detentions don’t accomplish anything except resentment toward the teacher. I am terrified that I will end up working in a school that has mandatory minimum sentencing for students that I will have to follow.